

History of Muscatine

Suel Foster

ISSN 0003-4827

Material in the public domain. No restrictions on use.

Recommended Citation

The Annals of Iowa, 10(2) (Apr. 1872): 95-99

Hosted by [Iowa Research Online](#)

citizens of the place, through the rain, by the light of a lantern, performed the ceremony of depositing the remains of the stranger in the silent grave — no one being present except ourselves and his two traveling companions. There was no hoary-headed father to weep over the death of a beloved son, to whom he was looking for aid and support, when age had rendered him helpless and dependent; no mother to mourn the loss of a departed child; no brother or sister to mingle a sympathizing tear. But in the darkness and stillness of the night, in the drizzling rain, by the dim light of the lantern, by ourselves alone, we gently lowered the body down into its narrow abode, closing the earth over the rude coffin, and left the stranger to repose in the silent grave until the morning of the resurrection.

This manner of a final disposal of a stranger, who, from his appearance, in the land of his birth, had friends and influence, much affected my spirits, and I retired to my lodgings with a sad heart.

HISTORY OF MUSCATINE.

BY SUEL FOSTER, MUSCATINE, IOWA.

EARLY TITLES OF LAND.

BEFORE Iowa became a territory, in 1838, this part of the country was called the "Blackhawk Purchase," it having been purchased of the Sac and Fox Indians by treaty, at the close of the Blackhawk War (in 1832), Blackhawk being chief of these united tribes. The "Blackhawk Purchase" was a strip of country along the Mississippi river, fifty to eighty miles wide, and extending from the state of Missouri to Prairie du Chien, or a little above. One point in the country of the "Blackhawk Purchase" was

fifty miles west from the foot of Rock Island, which brought the western boundary this side of Iowa City. Beyond this line no settler was allowed to "squat."

Settlement was made in Muscatine county in 1834, by Benjamin Nye, at the mouth of Pine Creek. Previous to this time, and immediately after the close of the Blackhawk War, Major George Davenport sent a man by the name of Farnham, from Rock Island, with two men, down to the "Grindstone Bluff," as it was then called, to put up a shanty of a trading-house, which Davenport supplied with a small stock of goods, to trade with the Indians.

John Vanater was unquestionably the first *bona fide* settler at Muscatine, and G. W. Kasey the second. Mr. Farnham's residence was at the upper end of the city of Rock Island, then called Stephenson. where he died in February, 1836, and where, in law, he never lost his citizenship. Mr. Kasey moved his family here in the spring of 1836, and in the fall of that year Mrs. Kasey died, and was buried where No. 1 school house now stands—the first white person buried at this place.

In the fall of 1835, John Vanater and Capt. Benjamin Clark bought the Farnham "claim" of Major George Davenport (who was only made colonel by common consent, he never having a commission of that title), for which they paid \$200. The "claim" was half a mile square, beginning at the trading-house, which stood in Water street, a few yards above the foot of Iowa Avenue (and the west end of the long, double log shanty was very near parallel with the east side of the Avenue), thence one-fourth of a mile down the river and one-fourth of a mile up, and half a mile back from the river, which is about sixty feet beyond Eighth street.

John Vanater, in the fall of 1835, moved into the old trading-house, using one end of it for a small stock of goods, which he was selling to the whites and Indians. Mr. Vanater and Captain Clark had the claim surveyed into town lots in May, 1836, by Major William Gordon, who

lived, at that time, in Rock Island, and a part of the time at his claim, just above the mouth of Pine Creek. They first named the town Newburg, but soon changed it to Bloomington, which name it retained about twelve years, when it was changed to Muscatine.

These proprietors soon began to sell undivided one-sixth and one-twelfth interests in the town. In August, 1836, my brother (Dr. John H. Foster) and I paid \$500 for one-sixth, which we bought of Captain Clark, it being the last portion he had. He then lived at Clark's Ferry, ten miles below Davenport, afterwards called Buffalo, where he thought there was a better location for a town. Many other persons bought undivided interests about that time and the following fall. Among those whom I can recall were Moses Couch, Chas. H. Fish, T. M. Isett, Adam and Henry Frink, Robert C. Kinney, William St. John, Captain G. W. Hight, B. White, William Devoe, and J. W. Nelly. As yet, but two cabins and two families were here. In the fall of 1836 some other families settled here. R. C. Kinney, late that fall, put up the rear part of his hotel, which yet stands as the rear part of Mr. J. G. Stine's hotel.

It was two years after this before the land was in market at the United States land office — namely, November, 1838, — and in March, 1839, that part of the city lying in township 76 was brought into market. That part of the city on which the county court house stands was pre-empted by the county commissioners, according to a law of congress, with the privilege of taking a quarter section by paying the land office \$1.25 per acre for it.

The above relates to the central part of the city. The lower part, or, as it was called, Kasey's addition, had other proprietors — G. W. Kasey, E. E. Fay, William St. John, N. Fulington, H. Reece, Jona Pettibone, L. C. and H. H. Hine, R. P. Lowe, Stephen Whicher, J. E. Fletcher, Breese & Higinbotham, Abijah Whiting, W. D. Abernathy, Alexas Smith, and others. This claim was a mile square, including the cemetery, Butlerville, and to the slough. The upper

addition included all that part east of the center of the court house square. After these titles were obtained of the government, a re-survey was made, and a plat recorded. [It is supposed that this plat has been lost from the records, and if such is the case, it is high time our city fathers had an authentic plat put on record again.]

The first government line run here for surveying this country into townships and sections was in December, 1836, months after the place had been surveyed, by private enterprise, into city lots. Mr. Brown, of Michigan, an old and experienced surveyor, had the contract of surveying this part of the country into townships, and one of the severest of Iowa's winter days the surveying party came in from the west, through the oak woods, running the township line between 76 and 77, and set their terminating post on the bank of the river, and on the east bank of Pappoose Creek, marking the number of the sections upon the cottonwood trees. About six months after, it was subdivided into sections. Then came the difficulties among claimants, for it often occurred that a settler's claim and farm was upon two quarters, and sometimes in four quarters. Good and honest neighbors had no difficulty in setting the lines of their farms, by deeding to each other that part of their claim which rightfully belonged to them. Other less neighborly neighbors had bitter quarrels. We established rules of law and rules for recording our claims, and established courts and juries; and, although we "poor devils" did not own a foot of the land, out of the necessity of our situation, the legislature of the territory passed laws to meet our necessities, making established claim lines binding and arbitrations legal. Legal men of the present day might think it a "drum-head court" that would undertake to settle the legal rights of parties to lands, the title of which was yet in the government. The crowns of Europe handed laws down to our forefathers, but we, the "squatters" of Iowa, handed laws up to our rulers, and they acknowledged our "sovereign power" and accommodated their laws to suit our necessity. Notwithstanding legislative aid in settling our acquired

rights to our homes, many and bitter were the quarrels between the claimants, and fights were not unusual, occasionally with deadly weapons, and fatal results. I have seen these disputed rights carried to the government land office, where the claimants would bid against each other, the performance usually terminating in a few "knock downs." In such cases, the land sale would be adjourned to the next day. This I saw occur among the settlers of Des Moines county, but I believe we managed to preserve the peace at the land sales, though we had to carry our court of claims with us to the land sales at Burlington in 1838 and 1839.

A legal squatter's claim consisted in putting up a shanty, or inclosing a few acres of land with a fence, or breaking prairie. The outlines must be marked with a plow, if on the prairie, or blazed on trees, if in the grove. This held the claim six months; then actual residence. Sometimes actual residence consisted in the squatter taking a blanket and a lunch out to the claim, and boarding and lodging there an hour or two, and washing his dirty stockings. This made a substantial claim for six months more.

ORIGIN OF THE NAME OF MUSCATINE.

On reading Bancroft's History, some years ago, in it I found a tribe of Indians of this name, and I have no doubt the name was brought here by them, before the Sacs and Musquakies came here. He says: "At the last village on Fox river ever visited by the French, where Kickapoos, Muscoutins, and Miamis dwelt together on a beautiful hill in the center of the prairies and magnificent groves, etc., * * * Marquette begged two guides of these Indians to pilot them to the portage from the Fox to the Wisconsin river, when he and his companion Joliet went on their voyage, and first discovered the upper Mississippi river." They "were the first white men who trod the soil of Iowa," June 25, 1673. I conjecture that a remnant of the Muscoutins, soon after this, were driven from Wisconsin, and formed a lodge upon the beautiful plains of Muscatine Island. The Sacs and Foxes knew nothing of the origin of this name.

Copyright of *Annals of Iowa* is the property of State of Iowa, by & through the State Historical Society of Iowa and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.